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# The Role of the Theatre Designer



Orestea storyboard image (1981)  
by Jocelyn Herbert  
National Theatre

## What is a theatre designer?

In the creation of a theatre production the person who decides what the performers will wear, what kind of environment they will inhabit, and on the objects or props with which they engage, is usually called a theatre designer. However, words are important and our choice of them often reflects what we think about what they are describing. For example, for much of the early to mid-20th century 'décor' was a common term for what designers created on stage, and 'décor by' was interchangeable with 'designed by' in theatre programmes. To a modern-day theatre designer 'décor' implies a superficiality that does not align with how they see their role. Some might even feel that 'theatre designer' does not adequately express their job, and they may prefer 'scenographer' or 'performance designer'.

lighting designer

stage designer

sound designer

designer

**THEATRE DESIGNER**

visual artist

performance designer

costume designer

scenographer

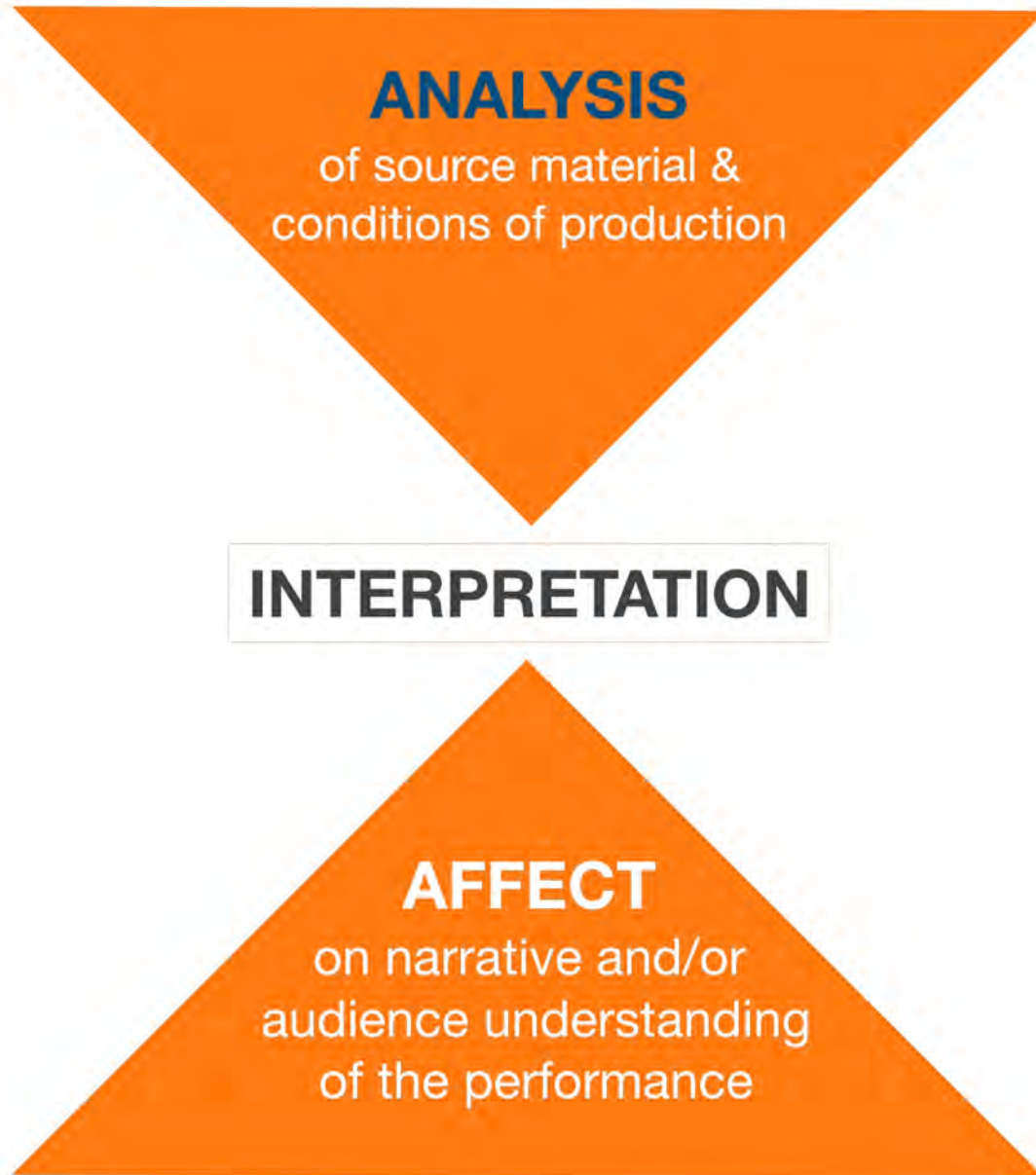




William Dudley in Rehearsals for *The Mysteries* (1985)  
by Nobby Clark  
National Theatre

The changing use of words and names is one demonstration that the status of the designer has changed throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. Many designers now consider themselves to be collaborators together with the director, performers and others involved in creating the production. Alongside this development, the position of the dramatic text as central to the creation of performance has been challenged and there are companies and artists for whom design elements are equal in importance to the spoken word, or even in some cases supersede it.

# Theatre designer process



The dramatic text, however, is still dominant in the majority of UK theatre making and in these cases the theatre designer will analyse and interpret the dramatic text. Additionally, the designer's process includes thinking about the practicalities of a production, such as the budget, the location, the target audience, the resources available, and who else they are working with. Moreover, they have to incorporate any themes that they and the director have chosen to highlight.

The designer will consider these factors, and more, to create a visual, spatial or aural interpretation for the production via their designs, which may include the sets, costumes and props. They then have to oversee the transformation of their ideas from the drawings, diagrams or scale models to an actual material staging.

What they design will very often affect the audience's understanding of the production.





Jocelyn Herbert Painting a Set (1988)  
by Nobby Clark  
National Theatre

The theatre designer's process can be compared to that of a painter who moves between working on their painting and standing back to view it from a distance. During the design process the designer will be constantly moving between being absorbed in the creative process and being critical; assessing, judging and adjusting their designs in relation to what the aims of the production are, and what else is being contributed by their collaborators. A theatre performance is a sensory experience involving vision, sound, light, texture, time, movement and space, all of which a designer needs to consider.

They will assess the structure and composition of what they are designing and what it might communicate to the audience in combination with everything else that is being contributed, such as the acting, directing, lighting, sound and so on. They help to orchestrate how the source material is presented in performance, how it is framed – conceptually, ideologically, structurally or physically. What they design can add layers of meaning, or a lens through which to view the words and actions being performed.



The Oresteia - Chorus of Trojan Slave Women - S... (1981)  
by Jocelyn Herbert  
National Theatre

This exhibit will look at three examples of designs for National Theatre productions that illustrate how important the role of the theatre designer is in the creation of performance:

*The Oresteia* (1981) designed by Jocelyn Herbert

*The Mysteries* (1977–1999) designed by William Dudley

*War Horse* (2007–present) designed by Rae Smith

As well as looking at the impact of their designs on the productions, the exhibit will examine the processes of the designers and how they worked with the other members of the production team such as the directors, writers, puppeteers, actors or lighting designers.



## THE ORESTEIA (1981) DESIGNED BY JOCELYN HERBERT

Jocelyn Herbert studied at the London Theatre Studio under Michel Saint-Denis and the theatre design group Motley who designed prolifically for the West End and Broadway between 1932 and 1978, and whose Motley Theatre Design Course continued to train designers until 2011. As part of Herbert's studies she was taught theatre history and mask-making. Used to working closely with writers and directors, she formed several close collaborations at the Royal Court Theatre. 'The Oresteia' was Herbert's first time working with director Peter Hall and writer Tony Harrison.



The Oresteia - Programme Cover (1981)  
by Design by Richard Bird and Michael Mayhew  
National Theatre



the trilogy by Aeschylus

# The ORESTEIA

in a version by Tony Harrison



In order of speaking:

## AGAMEMNON

Watchman  
Chorus of Old Men of Argos  
Clytemnestra  
Herald  
Agamemnon  
Cassandra  
Aegisthus

The scene:  
Argos

Interval of 40 minutes

## CHOEPHORI

Orestes  
Chorus of Trojan Women  
Electra  
Clytemnestra  
Nurse  
Aegisthus  
Servant  
Pylades

The scene:  
Argos

Interval of 15 minutes

## EUMENIDES

Priestess  
Apollo  
Orestes  
Ghost of Clytemnestra  
Chorus of Furies  
Athena

The scene:  
Delphi &  
Athens

The three Choruses are played by

Sean Baker  
David Bamber  
James Carter  
Timothy Davies  
Peter Dawson  
Philip Donaghy  
Roger Gartland  
James Hayes  
Greg Hicks  
Kenny Ireland  
Alfred Lynch  
John Normington  
Tony Robinson  
David Roper  
Barrie Rutter  
Michael Thomas

The other speaking parts are also played by this group

The names of the actors are not shown against the parts they play because this seems in keeping with the spirit of a masked production, and of a text in which the main role is the Chorus, at some point played by them all.

## Musicians

Percussion: Malcolm Bennett, Simon Limbrick, Ben Mason, Harp: Helen Tunstall.  
Wind: Rory Allam, John Harle, Jim Rae. Instrument Design: Arthur Soothill, Brian Ackerman.

## Anti-chorus

Nigel Bellairs, Mark Bond, Martin Garfield, Peter Gerald, John Gill, Colin Haigh, Peter Hale, Robert Howard, Graham Pountney, Robert Ralph, Norman Rutherford, Leslie Southwick, Glenn Williams, Richard Williams.

Director

Peter Hall

Music

Harrison Birtwistle

Designer

Jocelyn Herbert

Assistant Designer

Sue Jenkinson

Lighting

John Bury

Movement

Stuart Hopps

Staff Director

Kenneth Mackintosh

Assistant Director

Charlie Hanson

Music Director

Malcolm Bennett

Music Assistant

Ben Mason

Voice

Jane Manning

Production Manager

Michael Cass Jones

Stage Manager

Rosemary Beattie

Deputy Stage Managers

Courtney Bryant  
Brewyeeen Rowland

Assistant Stage Managers

Jill Macfarlane  
Rebecca Peek  
Tim Speechley  
Lesley Walmsley

Sound

Ric Green

Assistant Designer (Masks)

Jenny West

Assistant Production Manager

Mark Taylor

Assistant to the Lighting Designer

Paul McLeish

Length: about 5 hours including intervals. There are special arrangements for full buffet meals and quick restaurant service during the 40-minute interval.

Opening: The Olivier Theatre 28 November 1981

Programme written by Peter Fryer

Production photographed by Nobby Clark

The text of this version of *The Oresteia* is on sale at NT bookshops, published by Rex Collings at £3.50.

The poster for the production is also on sale at NT bookshops.

*The Oresteia* is split into three plays -

*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*. Tony Harrison translated and created new versions of the original plays that were written by Aeschylus in the 5th century BC. Created for the Olivier stage at the National Theatre, rehearsals were spread out over six months. To see all three plays together took five hours including intervals, although it was also possible to watch them individually. *The Oresteia* was directed by Peter Hall with music by Harrison Birtwistle.

*Agamemnon*, the first of the three plays, details the homecoming of King Agamemnon after the Trojan War. He is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra in revenge for his sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia. In the second play, *Choephoroi*, Agamemnon's son Orestes kills his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover. In the final play, *Eumenides*, Orestes is hunted by the goddesses known as the Furies. When he is captured he is tried for murder in an Athenian court and acquitted by the goddess Athena.



The Oresteia - Programme Credits (1981): Alfred Lynch, Peter Dawson, Barrie Rutter, Greg Hicks, David Roper, Michael Thomas, John Normington, Kenny Ireland, Roger Gartland, Tony Robinson, James Hayes, David Bamber, James Carter, Timothy Davies



The Protagonists' Masks  
Watchman, Athena, Pylades, Apollo, Agamemnon, Electra, Clytemnestra, Cassandra, Aegisthus, Orestes, Herald, Priestess, Nurse



his *Oresteia* work books had been left in Peter Hall's office at the National Theatre. Tony said I could look through them to give me an idea of how he felt about the project and what books to read until he came back. This was an invaluable introduction to how Tony worked and to what had been his inspirations while working on the text.

A feature of working with Tony is that you get postcards, letters and phone calls from all over the world where he has been to a museum, or seen a temple, or a play or read a new book which he has to communicate with you immediately in case it might be helpful, and one ends up starting a work book ones self.

One card said " There are a lot of references in the workbooks to background books etc, which you might find useful including what I now regard my essential reading in militant feminism and champions of her story. Their

contentiousness goes right to the key problems in the plays and I've found them more useful than any of the scholarship on Aeschylus. //

One reference to this subject is to be found in Apollo's speech in the 'Eumenidies' when he announces that the father is the only true parent or creator and the mother just the vessel:-

This document about working with Tony Harrison was written by Herbert sometime after *The Oresteia*. It shows that Tony Harrison was looking at militant feminism as part of his research. *The Oresteia* programme also included three pages of quotations about the subordination of women in western society and the switch from a matriarchal to patriarchal society in ancient Greek culture, illustrating that this was a major theme of the production. (Herbert, n.d., p.1)





Ancient Theatre at Epidauros, Greece (11 Oct 2011)  
by Carlos Corza  
National Theatre

Although Herbert had not designed for the Olivier stage before, she knew it well as she had been on the National Theatre Building Committee. The Committee was made up of a wide variety of experts whose role was to advise the architect Denys Lasdun. The Olivier is inspired by the 4th-century theatre at Epidauros, Greece.



expressive movements of the body. Masks carry conviction when created with a purpose in mind. The human face carries no such conviction and is overful of fleeting expressions, frail, restless, disturbed and disturbing because of all these changing moods.

The fact that Tony does not just translate an ancient greek text but, while respecting the rhythm and meaning of the original, creates a new version of his own, makes it imperative that his designer should not try to recapture what she imagines an original production was like but have the freedom to interpret his text in a contemporary way, still respecting the demands of the original as he has done. The text for the 'Oresteia' was written for the Olivier stage at the National Theatre and it was important to find a way to use that stage as an architectural space and not turn it into a theatrical set. These feelings were reinforced by reading in Oliver Taplin's "The Stagecraft of AEschylus" a chapter on the simplicity of means and conventions when staging a greek tragedy, whereas previous opinion made the erroneus supposition that a rich must mean extravagant staging.

Herbert's writing demonstrates that she took into account not only the written text, but her interpretation of the intentions behind Harrison's translation when designing the setting for *The Oresteia*. She also highlights that the play was specifically written for the Olivier stage and so she tried to find a way to respond to that auditorium. (Herbert, n.d., p.3)

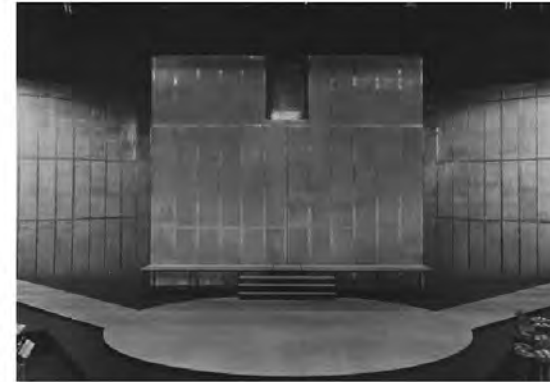




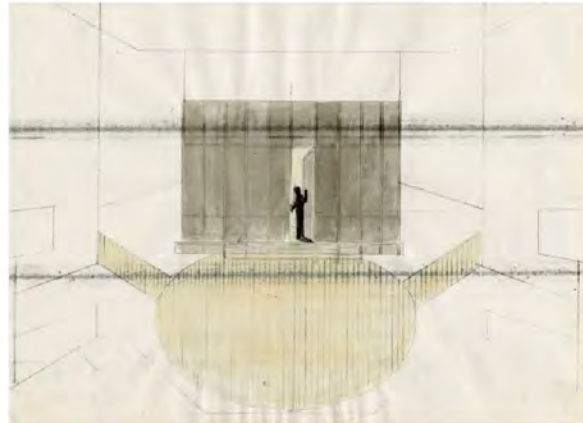
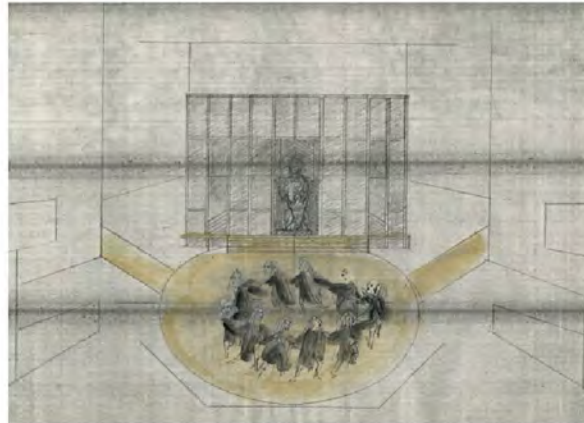
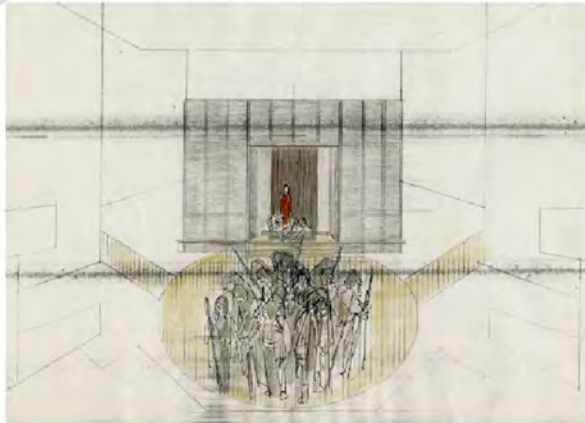
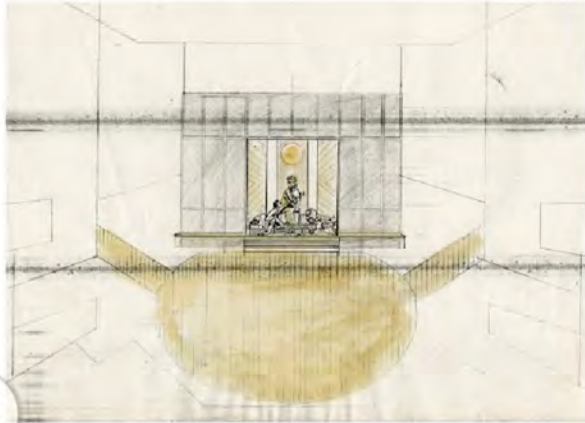
The Oresteia - Photograph of Set - Watchman do... (1981)  
by Jocelyn Herbert  
National Theatre

Herbert's design for the theatre closely follows the layout of a theatre such as Epidaurus, in effect including its important features inside the Olivier. The circular floor is the space that was called the 'orchestra', reserved for the chorus, with ramps leading to it from left and right – what the Greeks called 'eisodos' or 'parodos'. The raised platform and wall were called the 'skene', through which actors could enter and leave. The materials and construction of these elements reflect the building they are placed in. The simple wooden boards of the floor echo the wooden board imprints that mark all the concrete of the National Theatre building. The proportions of the panels and the metal mesh that makes up the 'skene' mirror the dock doors at the back of the Olivier stage. Herbert has captured the elegance and modernism of the building and created a modern version of an ancient Greek theatre.





Herbert created a versatile wall with panels that can provide different sized doorways to open in different configurations that create entrances of various widths. The doorways on the platform level create a powerful entrance that can be used by high-ranking characters to dominate the action or to show their status. Similarly, the platform provides an opportunity for the visual demonstration of authority or status, whilst the circle allows the chorus to group together or to spread out and to have different relationships to those positioned above or on the same level as them.



Herbert used her storyboard drawings to plan the use of the stage space. She drew a sketch of the stage, photocopied it, and then drew and painted ideas for her design onto the photocopies. These images show the different dynamics she envisaged for particular scenes using both the stage and the doorways in the back wall.





The Oresteia - Rehearsal (1981)  
by Photo by Nobby Clark  
National Theatre

Communications between Herbert and Hall during the first workshops for *The Oresteia* indicate that he did not want to pin down the design until fairly late in the process, and that this approach caused Herbert some anxiety. However, it meant that she was present in rehearsals and was able to work closely with Hall and the actors on the masks. It had been decided early on that all the actors would perform in masks, but it soon became clear that this was not a simple proposal. Not only was Herbert contributing to the process by working out the best kind of mask to be used, but she gave input into the way that they were used.





Herbert recalled that, 'The Furies are described as hideous figures with bloodshot eyes and snot coming out of their noses, and Peter Hall wanted bestial masks with blood coming from the mouths...The result was that the actors became like animals, tracking about, but that didn't seem to work with the text...We kept trying various faces and it was only gradually that we found it worked much better to make them rather beautiful and strange, and the text and the way the actors moved did the rest.' (Herbert in Courtney, 1993 p. 123)

According to Peter Hall, 'It [was] a painstaking, long and difficult process of trial and error, all the time judging every solution you come to in the most ruthless way.' (Hall in Courtney, 1993 p. 224)





Herbert also described how she developed the costumes during rehearsals by making droopy items of clothing out of cheesecloth for the actors, then asking them to wear them however they wanted to as they worked. She did drawings of them in the clothes and fixed on a costume or detail when she felt something was effective.



[TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT <https://youtu.be/LOC9VIn2gFo>]







Furies Mask - The Oresteia (1981)  
by Jocelyn Herbert  
National Theatre

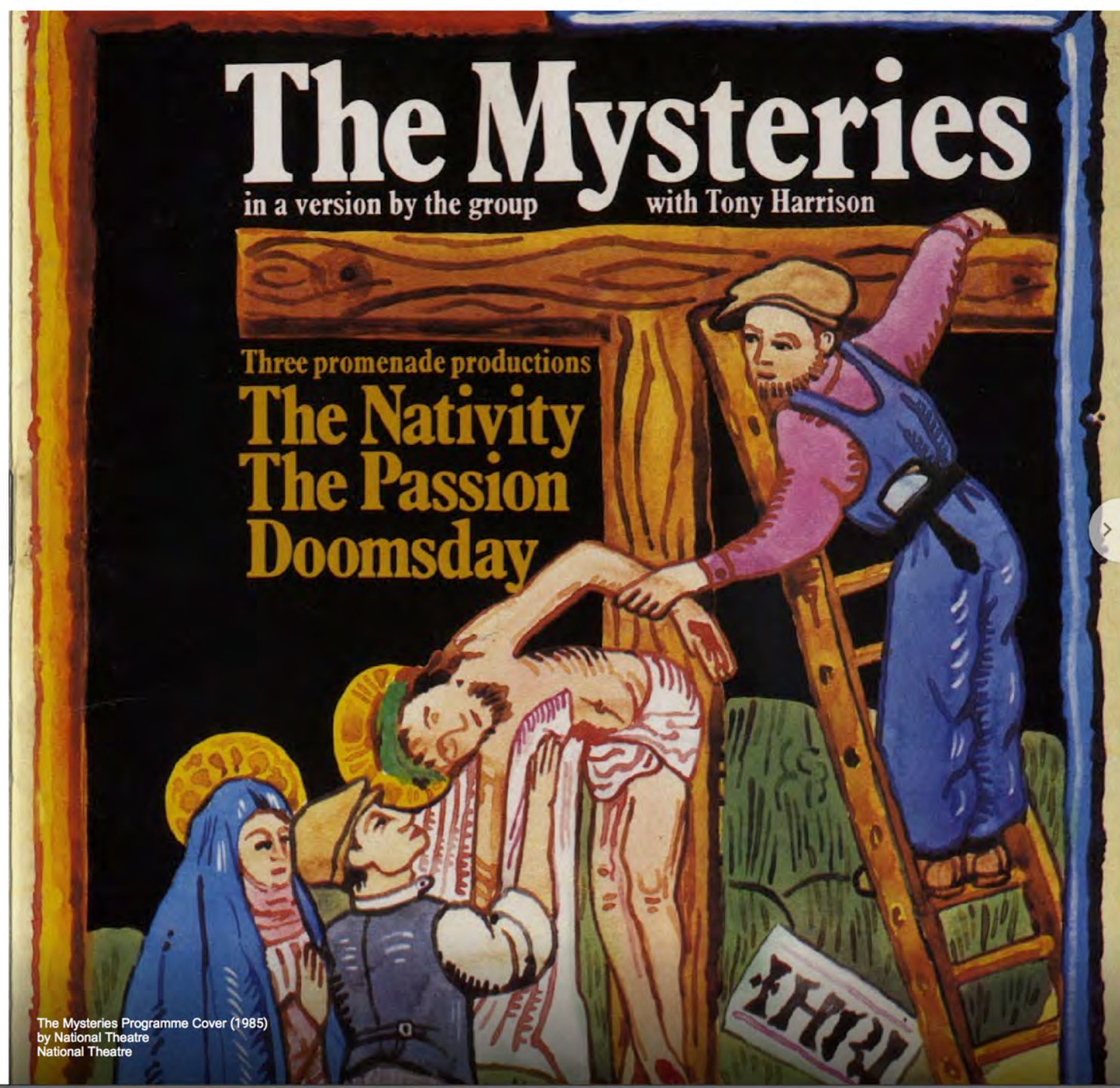
## SUMMARY

Jocelyn Herbert's designs for the stage and the masks allowed space for Tony Harrison's text. She interpreted Harrison's translation and approach in a visual way with a strong reference to the historical background but also a very modern aesthetic that responded and related completely to the space in which it took place. Her involvement in the rehearsals allowed for experimentation and for her to input into the development of the staging of the plays.



## THE MYSTERIES (1977–1985) DESIGNED BY WILLIAM DUDLEY

William Dudley studied Fine Art at Saint Martin's College of Art. He got involved in designing productions for the Tower Theatre, an amateur theatre company, and decided to study stage-design at the Slade School of Art. He met Bill Bryden, who was to become a National Theatre Associate Director with special responsibility for the Cottesloe Theatre, whilst they were both working at the Royal Court Theatre. This production was the first time Dudley worked with Bryden, his first design for the Cottesloe and the third production ever designed for that space.





The actors in this production are the NT group working under the direction of Bill Bryden – see facing page.

# The Mysteries

in a version by the group, with Tony Harrison



Three promenade productions

## The Nativity The Passion Doomsday

Though *The Nativity*, *The Passion*, and *Doomsday* are each complete in themselves, the three, seen in sequence as a cycle, tell the Bible story from the Creation to the Last Judgement

Cast in alphabetical order

	The Nativity	The Passion	Doomsday
<b>Brenda Blethyn</b> or <b>Dinah Stabb</b>	Mary	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
<b>David Busby</b>	Morris dancer	Disciple	Angel
<b>Jim Carter</b>	Mak	Fourth Soldier	Fourth Soldier
<b>Edna Doré</b>	Mrs Noah	Mary Mother	Mary Mother
<b>Christopher Gilbert</b>	Wise Man	Simon of Cyrene	Disciple
<b>Brian Glover</b>	God	Cayphas	God
<b>Howard Goorney</b>	Noah	John Baptist	Paul
<b>James Grant</b>	Wise Man	Peter	Peter
<b>Dave Hill</b>	Joseph	Third Soldier	Third Soldier
<b>Karl Johnson</b>	Abel	Jesus	Jesus
<b>Phil Langham</b>		Disciple	Angel
<b>Eve Matheson</b>	Eve	Mary Salome	Eve
<b>Derek Newark</b>	Abraham/Wise Man	First Soldier	First Soldier
<b>Robert Oates</b>	Cain	Barrabas	Disciple
<b>Stephen Petcher</b>	Adam/Isaac/Shepherd	Blind Man	John
<b>Trevor Ray</b>	Shepherd	Second Soldier	Second Soldier
<b>Jack Shepherd</b>	Lucifer	Judas	Satan
<b>Robert Stephens</b>	Herod	Pontius Pilate	Pontius Pilate
<b>John Tams</b>	Shepherd	Thomas	Thomas
<b>Anthony Trent</b>	Herod's Son	Annas	Annas
<b>Don Warrington</b>	Angel Gabriel	Angel Gabriel	Angel Gabriel
	Other parts played by the group		

Director	<b>Bill Bryden</b>
Designer	<b>William Dudley</b>
Lighting	<b>William Dudley &amp; Laurence Clayton</b>
Music Director	<b>John Tams</b>
Music	arranged and performed by <b>The Home Service</b>
Dances	arranged by <b>David Busby</b>
Staff Director	Production Manager
<b>Frank Nealon</b>	<b>Jason Barnes</b>
Stage Manager & Assistant to Bill Bryden:	Deputy Stage Manager
<b>John Caulfield</b>	<b>Trish Montemuro</b>
Assistant Stage Managers	Sound
<b>Peter Maccoby, Jane Suffling</b>	<b>Chris Montgomery</b>
Assistant Production	Assistants to Lighting
by National Theatre	Designers: <b>Mark Seaman</b>
National Theatre	<b>Ian Williams</b>

**The Home Service:**  
**Bill Caddick** (guitar, vocals), **Jonathan Davie** (bass, vocals), **Howard Evans** (trumpets), **Michael Gregory** (percussion), **Stephen King** (keyboards), **Graeme Taylor** (guitar), **Roger Williams** (trombone, tuba) with **Andrew Findon**, (flute, saxophones), **Phil Langham** (accordion, vocals), **Philip Pickett** (woodwind), and **Linda Thompson** (vocals).

**Length:** *The Nativity*, about 2 hours 30 minutes.  
*The Passion*, about 1 hour 50 minutes.  
*Doomsday*, about 2 hours.  
 There are no intervals

**Opening:** The Cottesloe Theatre, 19 January 1985

The Director wishes to thank **Sebastian Graham-Jones**, **John Russell Brown** and **William Bundy** for their work during the making of this production

The English Medieval Mystery Plays – consisting mainly of the York, Wakefield, Chester, and Coventry Cycles – were written and performed by working men, craftsmen.\* For example, in the York Cycle the Bakers created *The Last Supper*, and the Nail Makers *The Crucifixion*.

They were assisted by dramatic poets, most famously by the unknown author of *The Crucifixion* play who was commonly called the York Realist; and, in the Wakefield Cycle, by another unknown dramatist, the Wakefield Master, among whose contributions was the well-known Second Shepherd's play featuring Mak the Sheepstealer.

In similar fashion, the actors in this production have between them made this event, working on the text with Tony Harrison, and continuing the same process as when the plays were originally developed: "one of translation, accretion, adaptation, revision," according to Peter Happé in *English Mystery Plays* (Penguin 1975).

The original medieval presentations of the plays were performed during Corpus Christi on carts passing various locations ("stations") in the city from early morning till late at night.

\**Mys'tery* n. (archaic) craft, trade... Middle English, from medieval Latin...

**Production credits:**  
 Absciling technique devised by Phil Langham. Scenery and props constructed and painted by NT workshops. Metalwork by NT workshops, P E Kemp Engineers Ltd, and Kimpton Walker Ltd. Costumes and wigs by NT workshops. Costumes supervised by Adrian Gwilym. Miners helmets provided by the National Coal Board. Electric trucks by Rolatrac. Batteries by Ever Ready. Electric torches by Fico Ltd. Traffic lights by Greenham Trading Co Ltd.

English medieval mystery plays, notably the York and Wakefield cycles, were made into new versions by the production team, the actors, and writer Tony Harrison. The three plays that make up *The Mysteries* – *The Nativity*, *The Passion*, *Doomsday* – were created between 1977 and 1985 and remounted in 1999. Each play, taking place in the Cottesloe Theatre at the National Theatre, lasted between two and two and a half hours. They were directed by Bill Bryden, designed by William Dudley, and music was created by John Tams and The Home Service.

The collaborators appear to have been a tightly knit group. Director Bill Bryden has said that, '...*The Mysteries* were made not only by myself, but with Tony Harrison...William Dudley...and John Tams...' (Bryden, 2009, pt. 4 of 6, 54:00 min).

The mystery plays are based on Christian bible stories. *The Nativity* moves from God creating the universe to the birth of Christ, *The Passion* portrays Christ's life and death; and *Doomsday* details the God's disappointment with man and the Last Judgment.





Coventry Medieval Mystery Pageant (1825)  
by David Gee  
National Theatre

Medieval mystery plays took place in cities such as York or Wakefield. This image is a 19th-century conceptualisation of how the medieval mysteries were performed. Audiences would stand at a particular location – called a 'station' – whilst carts, which had been made into small stages by the town Guilds (associations of tradesmen or craftsmen), moved from station to station throughout the day telling stories from *The Bible*. If you stood outside the cathedral, for example, you would start the day with the cart that told the story of *The Creation* passing by, and end with the *Last Judgement* cart.





Cottesloe Theatre Auditorium (1977)  
by National Theatre  
National Theatre

*The Mysteries* were created for the Cottesloe (now Dorfman) Theatre, which is the smallest and most flexible theatre at the National Theatre. It was left as an empty space by National Theatre architect Denys Lasdun due to overspending during the construction of the building (Findlater, Curtis, et al., 1977, p. 31), but Peter Hall was insistent that a third theatre be built, even with only a small budget. Iain Mackintosh of Theatre Projects Consultants created a flexible studio space that was inspired by European courtyard theatres.

When Bryden was given special responsibility for the newly opened Cottesloe Theatre in March 1977 he proceeded to assemble a "creative family", an ensemble of performers, designers and technicians who frequently worked together' (Normington, 2007 p. 82).





The Mysteries - Rehearsal (1985)  
by Photo by Nobby Clark  
National Theatre

Bryden saw the mystery plays as 'people's theatre', and the concept for *The Mysteries* was that the plays were being put on by a group of modern workers, Trade Union members, as a parallel with the Guilds who put on the medieval plays. This idea related to all aspects of the production including the acting. Actor Jack Shepherd recalled that, 'When I took over the part of Judas in the autumn of 1978...I soon learned that the part I was playing was not Judas, in fact, but a man, a working man, who was playing the part of Judas....As I watched the company rehearse, I could see this idea working most clearly in Mark McManus's performance as Jesus. What Mark was actually playing was a Glasgow shipyard worker, dressed in a boiler suit and speaking the lines with such seriousness, such unaffected simplicity, that he hardly seemed to be acting at all.' (Shepherd in Shepherd and Dewhurst, 2006, p. 93)

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# INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM DUDLEY

26.03.18





The Passion - The Mysteries (1980)  
by National Theatre  
National Theatre

Dudley realised that boarding over the seating area of the Cottesloe would create a 'courtyard' somewhat like a medieval town square, with the balconies of the theatre acting like windows overlooking the square, and that instead of the carts moving from place to place, the action could take place in amongst the audience standing there.

It is claimed that the NT press officer John Goodwin coined the term 'promenade theatre' for this production, and, in fact, it could be argued that this is an early example of what we now call immersive theatre. The standing audience would find that the actors appeared alongside them and they would be gently moved from place to place as the performers inhabited different areas of the space, or they might, for example, be asked to help to pull on the edge of a huge blue silk cloth to create an image of rippling waves. Dudley had found a spatial solution that aligned perfectly with the aims of the production.





In keeping with the theme of workers putting on the plays using the resources at their disposal, Dudley placed tools, Trade Union banners, and everyday items around the balconies. The ceiling was hung with household articles such as cheese graters, colanders and pierced dustbins that each contained a flickering candle bulb. The overall effect was of an ornate environment, suggesting perhaps a church, until closer inspection revealed the details.

Cottesloe Theatre Set Up for The Mysteries (1985)  
by National Theatre  
National Theatre





The Nativity - The Mysteries (1985)  
by Michael Mayhew  
National Theatre

Modern tools and equipment were used, such as the forklift truck that raised Brian Glover's God to the heavens during the section of *The Nativity* in which God creates the universe.

The close physical proximity between the performers and viewers, and the ebb and flow of the crowd as it made way for actors or props, meant that the audience felt immersed in the action. It made them more willing to accept the conceit of the production, that normal people were putting on the plays and that the actors were workers playing the parts. It also disposed them to accept and be drawn into the simplicity and pragmatism of the theatricality created by the company. It was perfectly reasonable for an opening and closing umbrella to become Noah's dove, for example; this was not trickery but a game that everyone in the room was part of. As actor Jack Shepherd recalled, this ultimately resulted in moments such as when the audience became 'the crowd condemning Christ to death, shouting "Crucify him!" with the players.' (Shepherd and Dewhurst 2006, pp.159–60)



[TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT <https://youtu.be/nJslyoqklbY>]





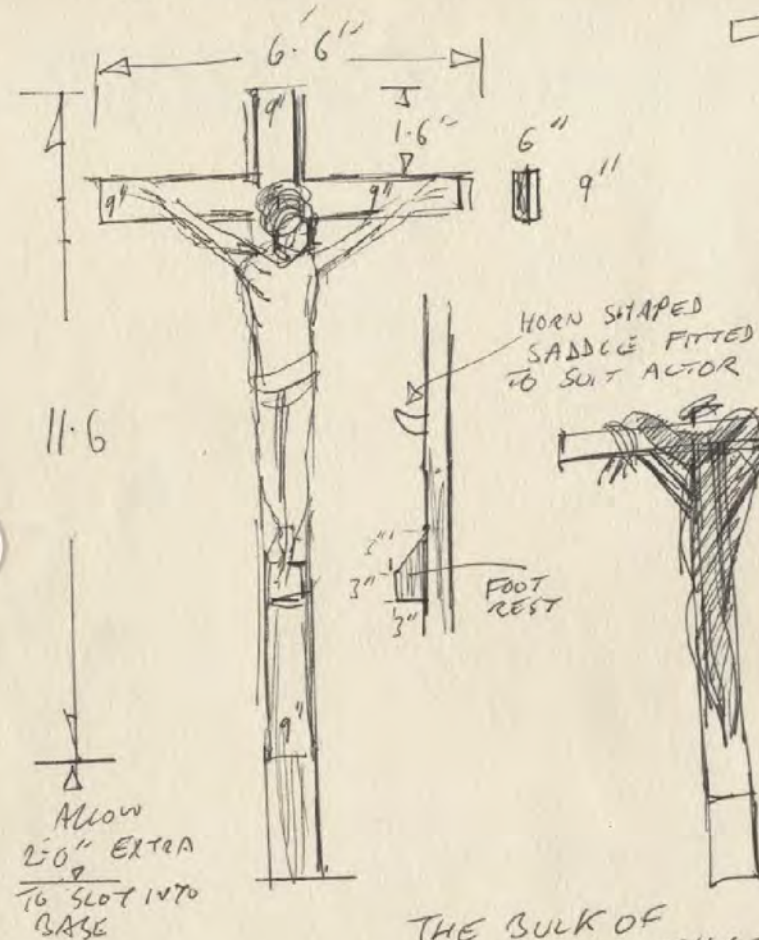
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# INTERVIEW WITH **WILLIAM DUDLEY**

26.03.18



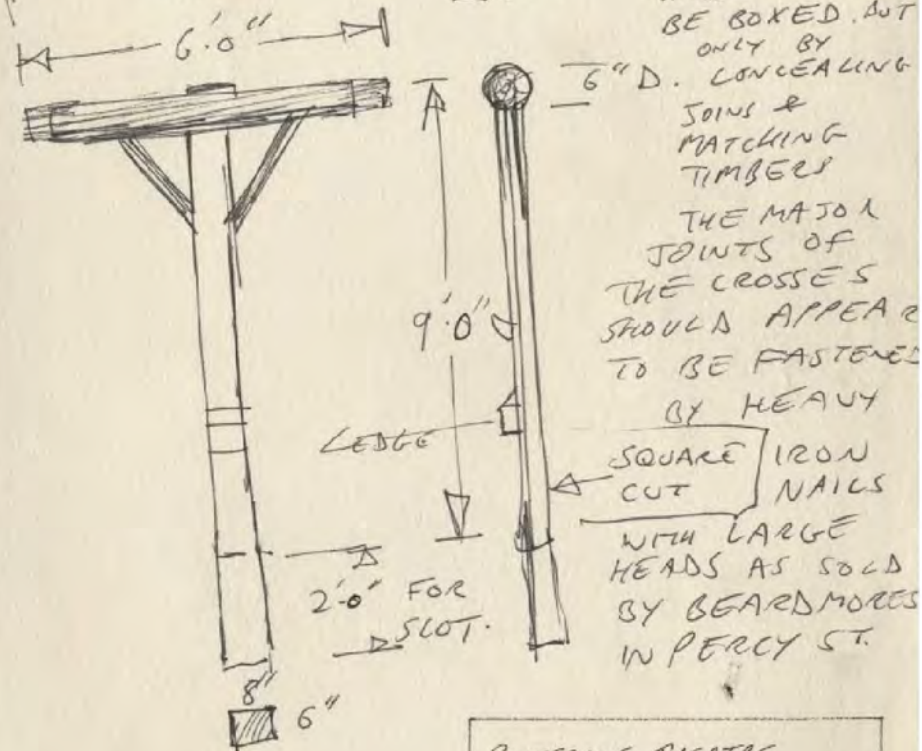
# YORK MYSTERY PLAYS JESUS CROSS 10'6"



THE BULK OF THE ACTORS WEIGHT IS CARRIED BY THE LITTLE HORN/SADDLE WITH THE FOOT LEDGE AS A BRACING POSITION

ALL 3 CROSSES MUST BE MADE FROM OLD DEMOLITION TIMBER WHICH IS A DUSTY CREOSOTE BROWN VERY DRY AND CRACKED "PAINTED OR BURNT & BRUSHED EFFECTS ARE DEFINATELY NOT WANTED TO CONSERVE WEIGHT THE SQUARE CUT TIMBERS CAN BE BOXED BUT ONLY BY JOINING & MATCHING TIMBERS THE MAJOR JOINTS OF THE CROSSES SHOULD APPEAR TO BE FASTENED BY HEAVY SQUARE IRON CUT NAILS WITH LARGE HEADS AS SOLD BY BEARDMORES IN PERCY ST.

## THIEVES CROSS 2'0"



COTTESLOE THEATRE  
MYSTERY PLAYS  
DIRECTOR BILL BAYDEN  
DESIGNER BILL DUDLEY.

## SUMMARY

In a situation where the whole company is contributing ideas, having a clear and simple concept enables judgements to be made as to how well each solution fits into it. Both the overall and the design concept behind *The Mysteries* was strong enough hold together productions that were created many years apart. Dudley had designed a space in which the audience became immersed and engaged in the action, and this chimed perfectly with the live music and the styles of the acting and the text.



## WAR HORSE (2007–present) DESIGNED BY RAE SMITH

Rae Smith studied theatre design at Central St Martins. Her early work included several productions with Theatre de Complicité including 'The Visit'(1989) and 'The Street of Crocodiles'(1992). She first worked with director Marianne Elliott in 2003 at the Royal Exchange Theatre where Elliott was Artistic Director between 1998 and 2005. They had worked on three large shows together prior to 'War Horse', one of which was 'Saint Joan' (2007) in the Olivier Theatre.



War Horse poster (2007)  
by Michael Mayhew  
National Theatre



**National  
Theatre**

Presented in association with  
**HANDSPRING PUPPET  
COMPANY**

*Cast in alphabetical order*

Major Nicholls .....	JAMIE BALLARD
Swallow/Emilie .....	ALICE BARCLAY
Chapman Carter/Rudi .....	JASON BARNETT
Sergeant Bone/Colonel Strauss/	
Sergeant Fine .....	JAMES BARRISCALE
Captain Stewart/Soldat Schmidt .....	SIMON BUBB
Joey's mother, a horse/Goose/	
Topthorn/Veterinary Officer Martin .....	FINN CALDWELL
David Taylor/Soldat Schultz .....	PAUL CHEQUER
Song Man .....	TIM VAN EYKEN
Young Joey/Topthorn .....	THOMAS GOODRIDGE
Joey's mother, a horse/Dr. Schweyk/	
Coco, a horse/Geordie .....	STEPHEN HARPER
Rose Narracott/Private Shaw .....	THUSITHA JAYASUNDERA
Veterinary Officer Bright/Karl .....	GARETH KENNERLEY
Crow/Joey .....	CRAIG LEO
Young Joey/Emilie .....	RACHEL LEONARD
Topthorn/Major Callaghan .....	TIM LEWIS
Joey .....	TOMMY LUTHER
Young Joey/Emilie .....	MERVYN MILLAR
Paulette/Crow .....	EMILY MYTTON
Swallow/Joey/Crow .....	TOBY OLIÉ
Ted Narracott/Coco, a horse .....	TOBY SEDGWICK
Ned Warren/Heine, a horse .....	ASHLEY TAYLOR-RHYS
Albert Narracott .....	LUKE TREADAWAY
Sergeant Thunder/Soldat Klebb .....	HOWARD WARD
Arthur Warren/Soldat Manfred .....	ALAN WILLIAMS
Heine, a horse/Ensemble .....	MATTHEW WOODYATT
Hauptmann Friedrich Müller .....	ANGUS WRIGHT

All other parts played by Members of the Company

**Musicians**

Colin Rae (Music Director, trumpet, flugelhorn, bugle)  
Richard Ashton (French horn, tenor horn)  
Andy Callard (trumpet, cornet, piccolo trumpet)  
Susi Evans (clarinet)  
Tracy Holloway (tenor trombone, euphonium)

**Directors**

MARIANNE ELLIOTT  
and TOM MORRIS

**Designer**

RAE SMITH

**Puppet Design & Fabrication**

BASIL JONES and ADRIAN KOHLER  
for Handspring Puppet Company

**Lighting Designer**

PAULE CONSTABLE

**Director of Movement**

TOBY SEDGWICK

**Music**

ADRIAN SUTTON

**Songmaker**

JOHN TAMS

**Music Director**

HARVEY BROUGH

**Video Designers**

LEO WARNER and MARK GRIMMER  
for Fifty Nine Productions Ltd

**Sound Designer**

CHRISTOPHER SHUTT

**Associate**

MERVYN MILLAR

**Company Voice Work**

KATE GODFREY, JEANNETTE NELSON

The novel *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo was adapted for the stage by playwright Nick Stafford. The production was created for the Olivier stage at the National Theatre during several workshop periods between 2005 and 2007. It was co-directed by Tom Morris and Marianne Elliott. Handspring Puppet Company created the puppets, with Toby Sedgwick as movement director. Adrian Sutton composed the music, John Tams contributed songs and Chris Shutt the sound design. The designer was Rae Smith, lighting designer Paule Constable, and 59 Productions were the video designers.

The production team were highly collaborative. Composer Adrian Sutton described how refreshing it was to 'come into [an] environment where people, all at the top of their game, are effectively yielding to each other and just allowing things to happen, and allowing themselves to fail in front of everybody else because there is no judgement.' (Sutton in National Theatre, 2016, 39 mins)

*War Horse* tells the story of a horse called Joey, who at the outbreak of World War One is sold to the cavalry and shipped to France where he becomes caught up in the fighting on both sides of the war. His original owner, a boy called Albert, enlists in the army in

# War Horse

Based on the novel by MICHAEL MORPURGO  
Adapted by NICK STAFFORD

Production sponsored by

War Horse - Programme Credits (2007)  
by National Theatre Graphic Design Studio  
National Theatre





War Horse - Joey: the Horse Puppet (2007)  
by Basil Jones & Adrian Kohler (Handspring Puppet  
Company), Photo: Simon Annand  
National Theatre

Impressed by a previous Handspring Puppet Company production, Tom Morris started to look for a play that could have an animal puppet as the central character – Michael Morpurgo's novel fitted the bill. *War Horse* sees the events of World War One entirely from the point of view of a horse and conveys the universal suffering of war 'without taking sides' (Morpurgo, 2008, p. 19). It was decided early on that the horse would not speak and so writer Nick Stafford had to create and fill out all the human characters.

Stafford said, 'The production places innocence at the heart of human depravity and duplicity and mendacity and hopes it survives' (Stafford in Bickerstaff and Grabsky, 2015).





Rae Smith's set is deceptively simple but is carefully designed to be evocative and flexible. It is able to suggest gentle English countryside as well as harsh WW1 battlefields when combined with Paule Constable's lighting design. A circular stage of textured flooring conveys ploughed fields or the fragmentation and chaos of the front line; and a projection screen shaped like a torn strip of paper arcing around the Olivier stage can be seen as clouds, a landscape, a sky or drifting mist. Smith's sketches, drawn from the point of view of a British Army officer, are projected onto the screen, as are animations during certain scenes. Smith described how the sketches lifted the portrayal of the locations into areas of imagination and feeling which helped the audience to connect to the story (Smith, 2019, 20 mins). She also explained how the screen "will directly hold and focus what is going on in front of it. But "the magic of the storytelling," she says, "depends on the seamless blend" between the screen and stage action' (Millar, 2007, p.63).





War Horse - Rehearsal (2007)  
by Photo by Simon Annand  
National Theatre

The process of making *War Horse* was spread out over several years. There were three periods of workshopping that took place at the National Theatre Studio between 2005 and 2007 before the rehearsal period. The premiere of *War Horse* was in October 2007. Smith described how having a longer rehearsal period was important in order to achieve coherence between all the different elements of the production and 'allows the project to crystallise amongst a group of people as opposed to one person or an auteur...And so, you can enjoy your collaboration with your colleagues and learn a lot from it as well...We had time to get over conflicts of interest'(Smith, 2019, 23 mins).





War Horse - Sketch Model (2007)  
by Rae Smith  
Rae Smith's website

The following video explains how Smith contributed to the creative process in workshops and rehearsals by encapsulating ideas and moments of the rehearsal process in her sketches. She also shared her visual research, brought in her scale models, and created storyboards. Her presence in the room was highly valued by the other members of the team, who describe her as, 'looking at everything, she is enthusiastic about what she sees, she sort of circulates around an idea, and then crystallises it into something.' (Kohler in Millar, 2007, p. p.66). Smith herself talked about observing, giving opinions on how well things were working and suggesting solutions to problems, but emphasised the strength of the collaboration:

'I think if you talk with a whole group of people about what's good or interesting or clear about something, then the group's mind can define it. People who...have a deeper understanding of a particular aspect...can solve the problem or the thing that's unclear to you.'(Smith in Millar, 2007, p. p.38)








[TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT <https://youtu.be/iTYDVUtsOZI>]

# INTERVIEW WITH RAE SMITH

18.01.19



## WARHORSE STORYBOARD (Revised Aug 2007) Rae Smith

Sc	Pg	SET(machine)	DRAWN / WRITTEN ON PAPER	STYLE	SHADOW PUPPETS / SILHOUETTES	PUPPETS	PROPS	FX	WORK IN PROGRESS	PERFORMERS
1		DEVON- Open country <del>Date written: 1 August 1912</del> <del>SUNRISE: opening space ritual</del> SKY WAKES UP BIRDS FIELD <del>Underwritten: Edcelot, Devon September 1912</del>	The blackness of the theatre <del>Part of scene</del> <del>Model scene</del> Cyclorama reveals light: <i>sky</i> Reveal Alice & Joey	 	Nicholls writing August 1912 From form sketch Long white watercolour Nicholls sketchbook as front curtain: open page Blue watercolour (sky)	1912 literal / lyrical pastoral English watercolourists		<del>Edcelot - crowd</del> <del>Edcelot</del> <del>Edcelot</del> Nicholls sketchbook on playbills <del>from page</del> 2 swallows Black silk material reveal Alice & Joey	<del>Reveals torn paper handwriting</del> <del>Edcelot</del> <del>Edcelot</del> Watercolour with brush Written ? Handless Filled blue screen hand	Puppeteers Neutral chorus Story tellers (long entry into space) ENTRY OF COMPANY DISTANCE CLOSE ENTRY INTO SPACE
		JOEY REVEALED, ALICE morning <i>FENCE</i>	FIELD: Men enter long entrance from back Chorus song		<i>Green fields trees</i>	Field. Reveal animals Alice and little Joey	Field (11 field poles) becomes fence...			Ensemble Storytellers who sing into being. Are fence.
b		THE FENCE APPROACHES			Rural landscape Town in distance	Watercolour & drawing - town revealed	Joey (little), Alice	Poles / field...		<i>Remember song</i>
2		AUCTION Morning Open air Village square	Alice off.		High street drawn (close up of what we saw before)	Drawn and puppet combination Tower stands out	Church clock Edcelot? Or high street Edcelot Chorus line	Alice taken away Joey captured by men Away by Ted.	Becomes pen. Fence = 2 pens, rope over Alice's head, pint, money - hole in pocket, noose from rope (Joey), whip (Ted), auctioneer crate / stick, chorus fence, Joey noose, Alice's noose, Joey's rope. <i>All earned on by actors.</i>	<del>Edcelot</del> <del>Edcelot</del> Ensemble, Auctioneer, Albert, Ted, Ned, Warre Ringsiders, (pen) Reveal some villagers

War Horse was a complicated production that had a large production team working closely together. In the following video Smith describes the different kinds of storyboards that can help to move the process forward and to achieve clarity about what could happen once the production is placed onto the stage. In the rehearsal room only some of the elements of the final production can be seen, such as the actors, props, puppets and a rough layout of the space. It is rarely possible in the UK for the main technical aspects like the set, lighting, video projection and sound to be fully tried out before the 'technical' rehearsals that take place on stage in the lead up to the preview performances. This is why a storyboard such as the one created by Smith (pictured) is so important as a visualisation and guide, giving a sense of how everything could work together and of the overall flow and movement of the whole production.



[TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT <https://youtu.be/2bgHWrOvE6A>]

# INTERVIEW WITH RAE SMITH

18.01.19



[TO VIEW VIDEO VISIT <https://youtu.be/7XoQE8PN-Es>







War Horse - Soldiers Silhouetted (2007)  
by Photo by Simon Annand  
National Theatre

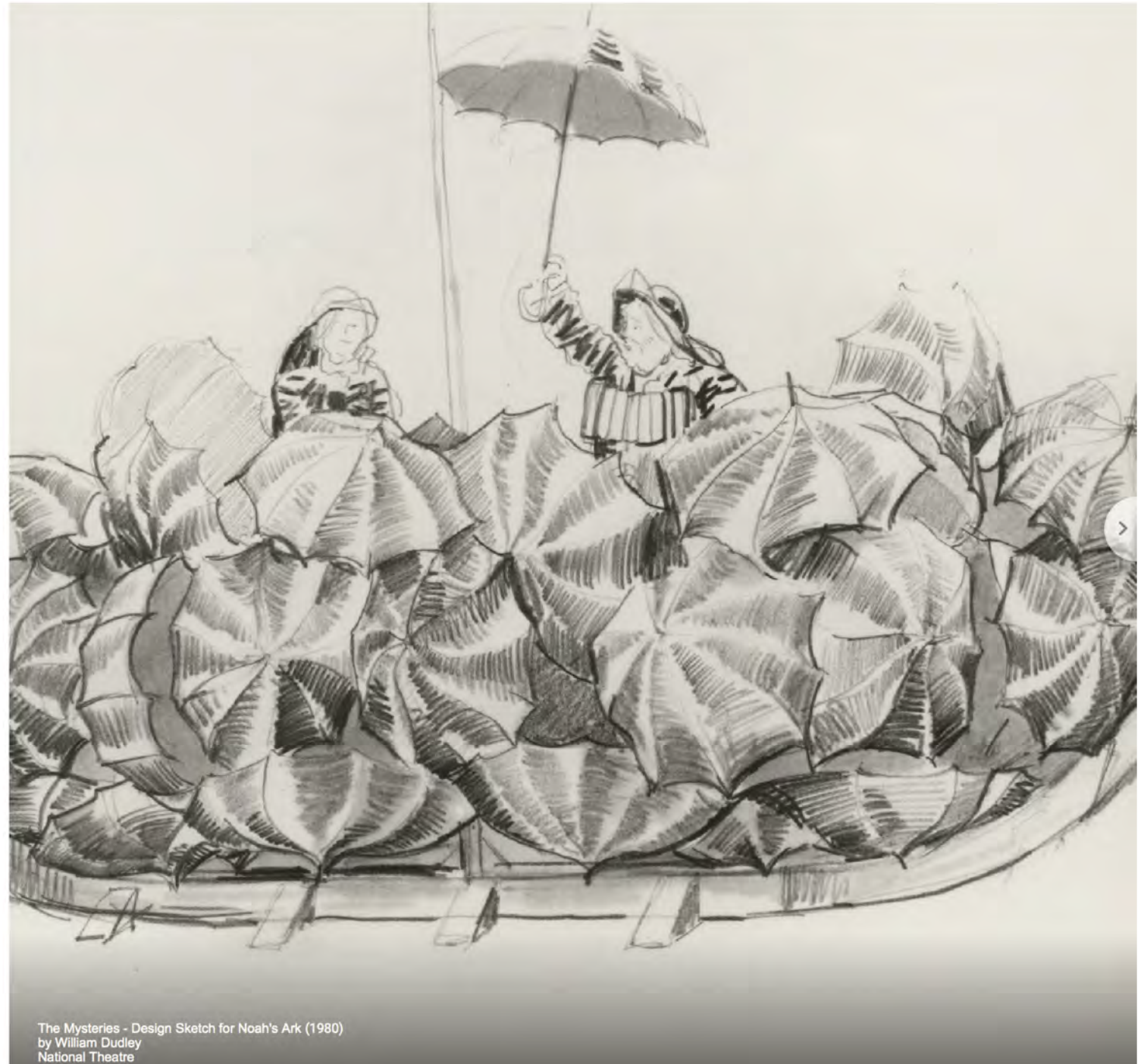
#### SUMMARY:

Rae Smith created an open and generous space for the actors, puppets, lighting and projection to work together seamlessly to tell the story in a simple and honest way. The design was able to achieve what Tom Morris described as hybrid between a small-scale 'devised show and some gargantuan Hollywood film' (Morris in Millar, 2007, p. 47). The unity of all of the aspects of the production is unusual. On their own each element might be charming or aesthetically pleasing, but together they powerfully convey the emotion, narrative and themes of the production.



## CONCLUSION

This online exhibit has used productions in the National Theatre Archive to analyse the role that the theatre designer plays in the creation of performance. These productions have all been based in a theatre building and have all had a text at their core, but the findings also have relevance for designers that work in other situations such as devised or site-specific performance. The three productions shown here demonstrate that design can create a visual, aural and sensory framework within which the concepts of the production become apparent. The audience's experience of the staging can encourage them to become receptive to the themes, as in Dudley's organisation of the Cottesloe for his design of 'The Mysteries'; design can allow ancient and modern to co-exist as in 'The Oresteia'; or it can hold together complex productions, allowing all the elements to seamlessly tell the story of the piece, as in 'War Horse'.



The Mysteries - Design Sketch for Noah's Ark (1980)  
by William Dudley  
National Theatre



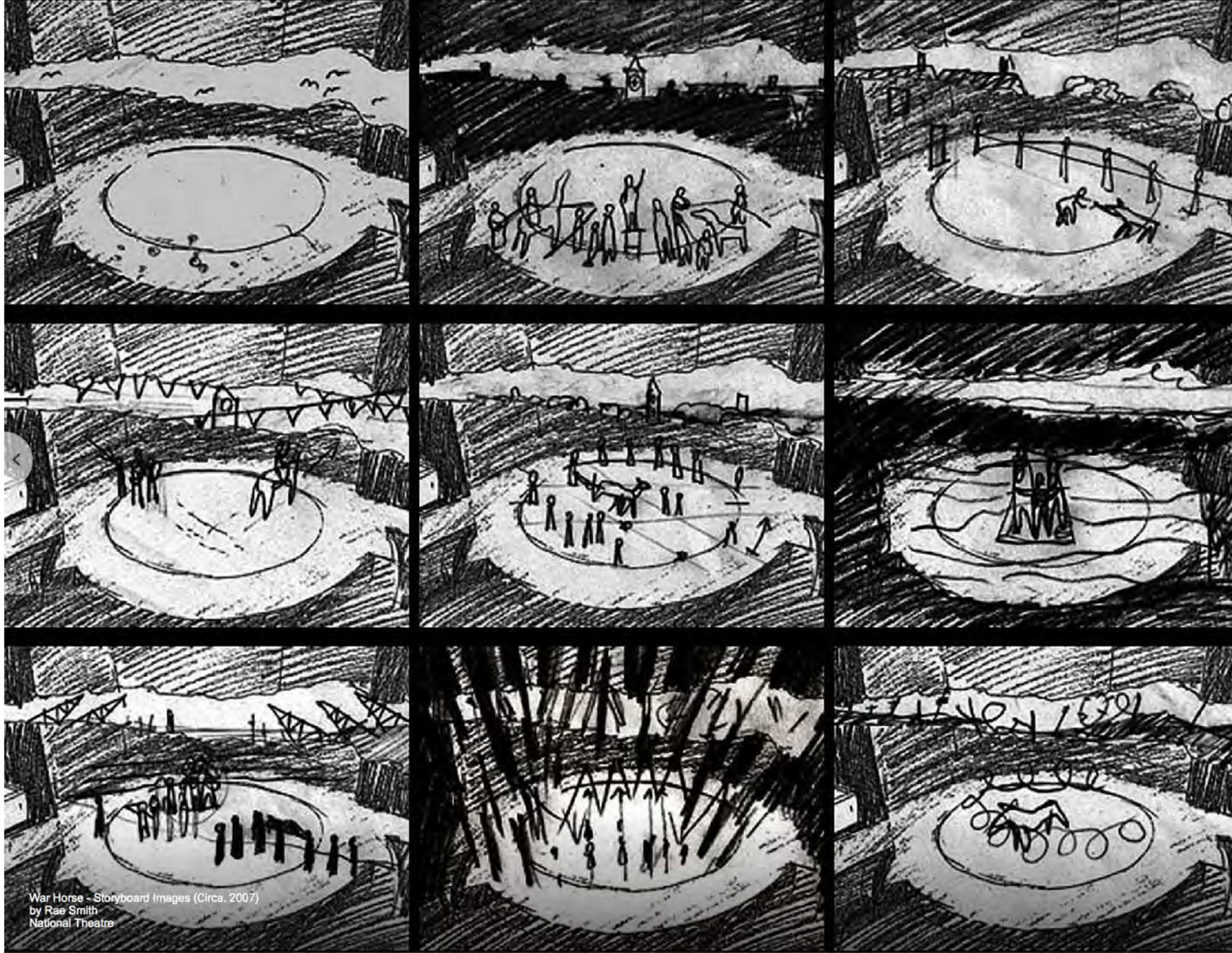


War Horse - Battle Charge Scene (2007)  
by Photo by Simon Annand  
National Theatre

Theatre is a collaborative art, and although collaboration does not equate to democracy and can range from consultation to co-creation, it is not possible to make performances entirely alone. Not only is there a physical transformation that needs to happen from the page, or thought, to an actual material staging, but it also has to pass through the interpretation of all the people involved, such as directors, designers, actors and makers.

Each of the three productions in this exhibit had a long rehearsal or workshopping period that enabled the designers to be more involved in the creation of the work than has been traditional in the UK. The designer and director typically work together before rehearsals start to finalise the design, which is then built, made or sourced whilst the director works with the performers. Consequently, it is rarely feasible, for reasons of cost and time, for substantial alterations to the design to be made in response to rehearsals.





War Horse - Storyboard Images (Circa. 2007)  
by Rae Smith  
National Theatre

Economics play another factor in preventing designers from being more involved in rehearsals, because only two people, the director and designer, are employed during the development of the design, rather than the whole cast and crew. It is notable, therefore, that the three examples used in this exhibit took place at the subsidised National Theatre. Tom Morris, amongst others, has stated that *War Horse* would not have been such a huge success, grossing £15.3 million in 2012, for example, without the time and money that the National Theatre spent on it, and the risk that they were prepared to take by making that investment. (Morris, 2012)

There are performance companies, other than large subsidised organisations, that can, and do, fully integrate designers into their systems of creation. There are several possibilities why this is the case; they may have been set up as a collective for whom collaboration is central to their approach to theatre-making, they may devise their work or their productions may simply have the flexibility of being smaller in scale and therefore able to respond quickly to design developments.

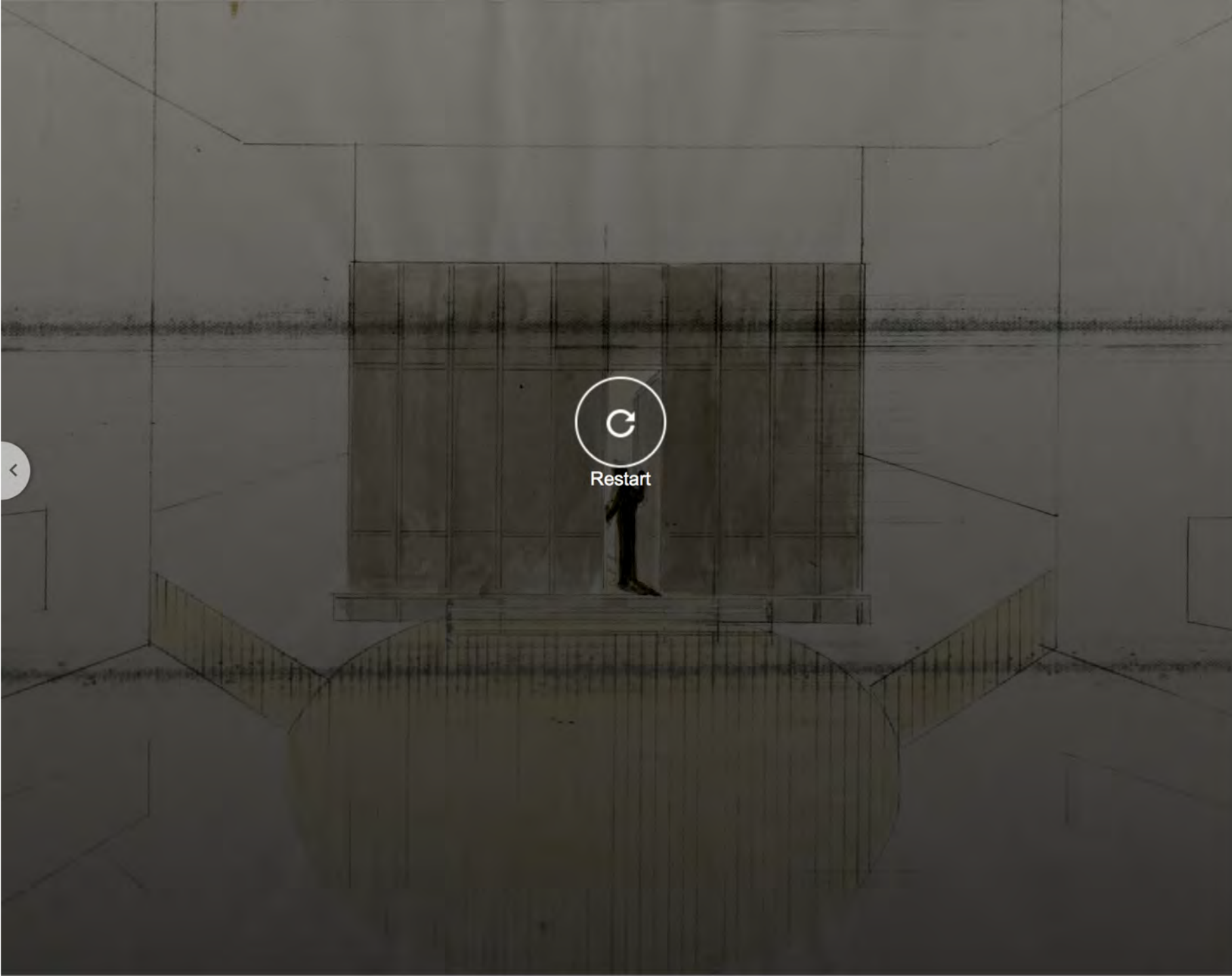




Whether or not there are opportunities for designers to be involved in rehearsals, this exhibit has shown the ways that designers help to orchestrate how a theatrical event is presented, how their designs are connected to all aspects of performance and the impact that design can have on the audience's experience and understanding of what they are watching.

Production Team in the War Horse Technical Rehe... (2007)  
by Rae Smith  
National Theatre





## Credits

The *Role of the Theatre Designer* online exhibition was created for the National Theatre by Sophie Jump, Jocelyn Herbert Fellow (2018, funded by the Linbury Trust) at Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon, University of the Arts London. It forms part of a collaboration between the National Theatre and University of the Arts London.

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### Other Jocelyn Herbert Fellowships outcomes:

Eleanor Margolies, (2016-18, funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation)

### [fromthejocelynherbertarchive.com](http://fromthejocelynherbertarchive.com)

Matthew McFrederick, (2018, funded by the Linbury Trust), *Staging the Real: theatre design symposium* presentation videos

[tinyurl.com/stagingthereal](http://tinyurl.com/stagingthereal)

### Useful links:

National Theatre Archive, that also houses the Jocelyn Herbert Archive

[nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive)

National Theatre videos, podcasts and online exhibitions related to theatre design and other backstage roles: